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Welcome to...

HOME	ARTICLES	RESEARCH	LINKS	CONTACT	BUY BOOK	PSYCARE SERVICES	SITE MAP
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Symptoms of Parental Alienation

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To prevent the devastating effects of Parental Alienation, you must begin by recognizing the symptoms of PA. You will notice that many of the symptoms or behaviors focus on the parent. When the child exhibits hatred and vilifies the targeted parent, then the condition becomes parental alienation syndrome. After reading the list, don't get discouraged when you notice that some of your own behaviors have been alienating. This is normal in even the best of parents. Instead, let the list help sensitize you to how you are behaving and what you are saying to your children.

1. Giving children choices when they have no choice about visits. Allowing the child to decide for themselves to visit when the court order says there is no choice sets up the child for conflict. The child will usually blame the non-residential parent for not being able to decide to choose whether or not to visit. The parent is now victimized regardless of what happens; not being able to see his children or if he sees them, the children are angry.
2. Telling the child "everything" about the marital relationship or reasons for the divorce is alienating. The parent usually argues that they are "just wanting to be honest" with their children. This practice is destructive and painful for the child. The alienating parent's motive is for the child to think less of the other parent.
3. Refusing to acknowledge that children have property and may want to transport their possessions between residences.
4. Resisting or refusing to cooperate by not allowing the other parent access to school or medical records and schedules of extracurricular activities.
5. A parent blaming the other parent for financial problems, breaking up the family, changes in lifestyle, or having a girlfriend/boyfriend, etc.
6. Refusing to be flexible with the visitation schedule in order to respond to the child's needs. The alienating parent may also schedule the children in so many activities that the other parent is never given the time to visit. Of course, when the targeted parent protests, they are described as not caring and selfish.
7. Assuming that if a parent had been physically abusive with the other parent, it follows that the parent will assault the child. This assumption is not always true.
8. Asking the child to choose one parent over another parent causes the child considerable distress. Typically, they do not want to reject a parent, but instead want to avoid the issue. The child, not the parent, should initiate any suggestion for change of residence.
9. Children will become angry with a parent. This is normal, particularly if the parent disciplines or has to say "no". If for any reason the anger is not allowed to heal, you can suspect parental alienation. Trust your own experience as a parent. Children will forgive and want to be forgiven if given a chance. Be very suspicious when the child calmly says they cannot remember any happy times with you or say anything they like about you.
10. Be suspicious when a parent or stepparent raises the question about changing the child's name or suggests an adoption.
11. When children cannot give reasons for being angry towards a parent or their reasons are very vague without any details.
12. A parent having secrets, special signals, a private rendezvous, or words with special meanings are very destructive and reinforce an on-going alienation.
13. When a parent uses a child to spy or covertly gather information for the parent's own use, the child receives a damaging message that demeans the victimized parent.
14. Parents setting up temptations that interfere with the child's visitation.
15. A parent suggesting or reacting with hurt or sadness to their child having a good time with the other parent will cause the child to withdraw and not communicate. They will frequently feel guilty or conflicted not knowing that it's "okay" to have fun with their other parent.
16. The parent asking the child about his/her other parent's personal life causes the child considerable tension and conflict. Children who are not alienated want to be loyal to both parents.
17. When parents physically or psychologically rescue the children when there is no threat to their safety. This practice reinforces in the child's mind the illusion of threat or danger, thereby reinforcing alienation.
18. Making demands on the other parent that is contrary to court orders.
19. Listening in on the children's phone conversation they are having with the other parent.
20. One way to cause your own alienation is making a habit of breaking promises to your children. In time, your ex-spouse will get tired of having to make excuses for you.

[Return to Parental Alienation Articles Index](#)
[Return to Parental Alienation Homepage](#)

HOME	ARTICLES	RESEARCH	LINKS	CONTACT	BUY BOOK	PSYCARE SERVICES	SITE MAP
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We would like to hear from you but please remember that your e-mail should be brief and our response, if any, does not constitute therapy or consultation. Thank you. Send e-mail to douglas900@aol.com Or, call my office at: 1-330-759-2310.